

Washington, D.C. - The Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security, and Claims, of which Congresswoman Linda Sánchez (CA-39th) is a member, today held an oversight hearing on the "War on Terrorism: Immigration Enforcement Since September 11, 2001."

The following is the statement Sánchez made during the hearing:

Good afternoon, and thank you to all of the witnesses here today. This is a vitally important topic that needs careful attention, and I thank Chairman Hostettler and Ranking Member Jackson-Lee for scheduling this hearing.

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, this country has focused a great deal of time and energy on finding ways to keep this nation and the world safe from terrorism. Unfortunately, some of those measures have come at the cost of other American values, such as the free movement of people and goods, freedom of speech and association, and due process under the law. The very difficult task we have is to balance our need for national security with our need to protect people's rights.

I am concerned about all of the various liberties that are being invaded or that are at stake. I want to highlight two in particular. First, I am distressed over the recent decision requiring state and local law enforcement officials to enforce immigration laws. And apparently, I am not the only one distressed over this. Local and state officials, including members of the LAPD, have protested this since the idea was first mentioned. They continue to do so. In addition, a variety of groups across the political spectrum are concerned about such a set-up.

Even without regard to civil liberties, this decision is problematic. Law enforcement is already burdened with keeping track of all the numerous criminal laws; now they are being expected to understand and remember countless immigration laws as well. Inevitably, we will see situations where a person who looks Arab or Latino or otherwise like an immigrant is detained by a police officer, who thinks the person may be in violation of the immigration laws only to discover later that the person detained is a citizen.

I'm also gravely concerned about the workplace sweeps that have been occurring around the nation. Many of them are connected to "Operation Tarmac," which purports to make our airports safer. Unfortunately, there is little or no evidence that it is doing that. Instead, we have tens of thousands of innocent people being detained and harassed as they try to do their jobs. All at a great expense to the taxpayers of this country.

The encroachments on our civil liberties go far beyond the two I have mentioned here. When looked at as a whole, these invasions of our rights represent severe attacks on the values cherished in a democracy. We must be vigilant in ensuring that, in our desire to feel safe, we do not adopt questionably successful measures that are certain to alienate our immigrant communities. This hurts our ability to effectively fight terrorism, as every citizen, and every community, have an important role to play in our nation's security. Thank you.